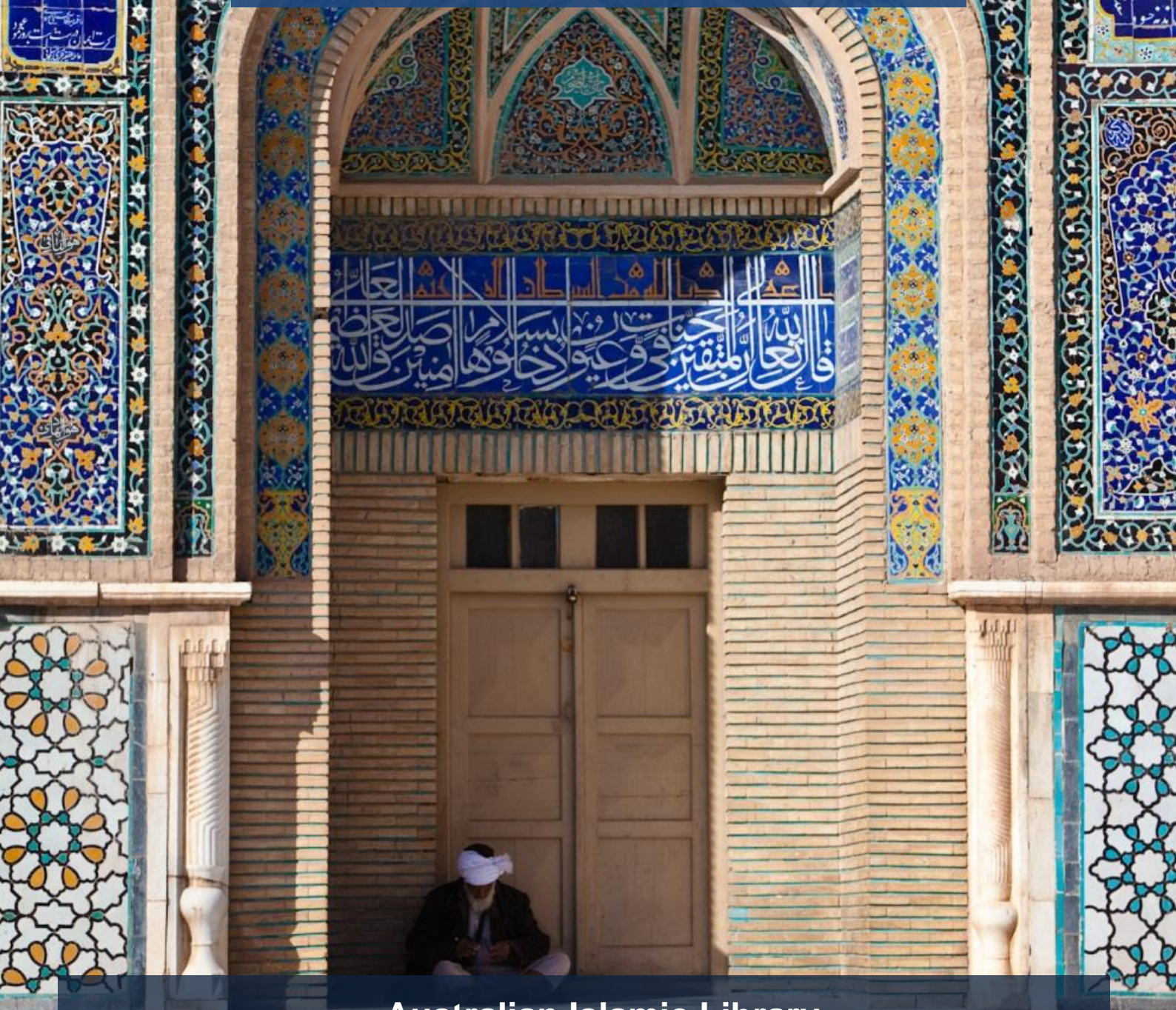
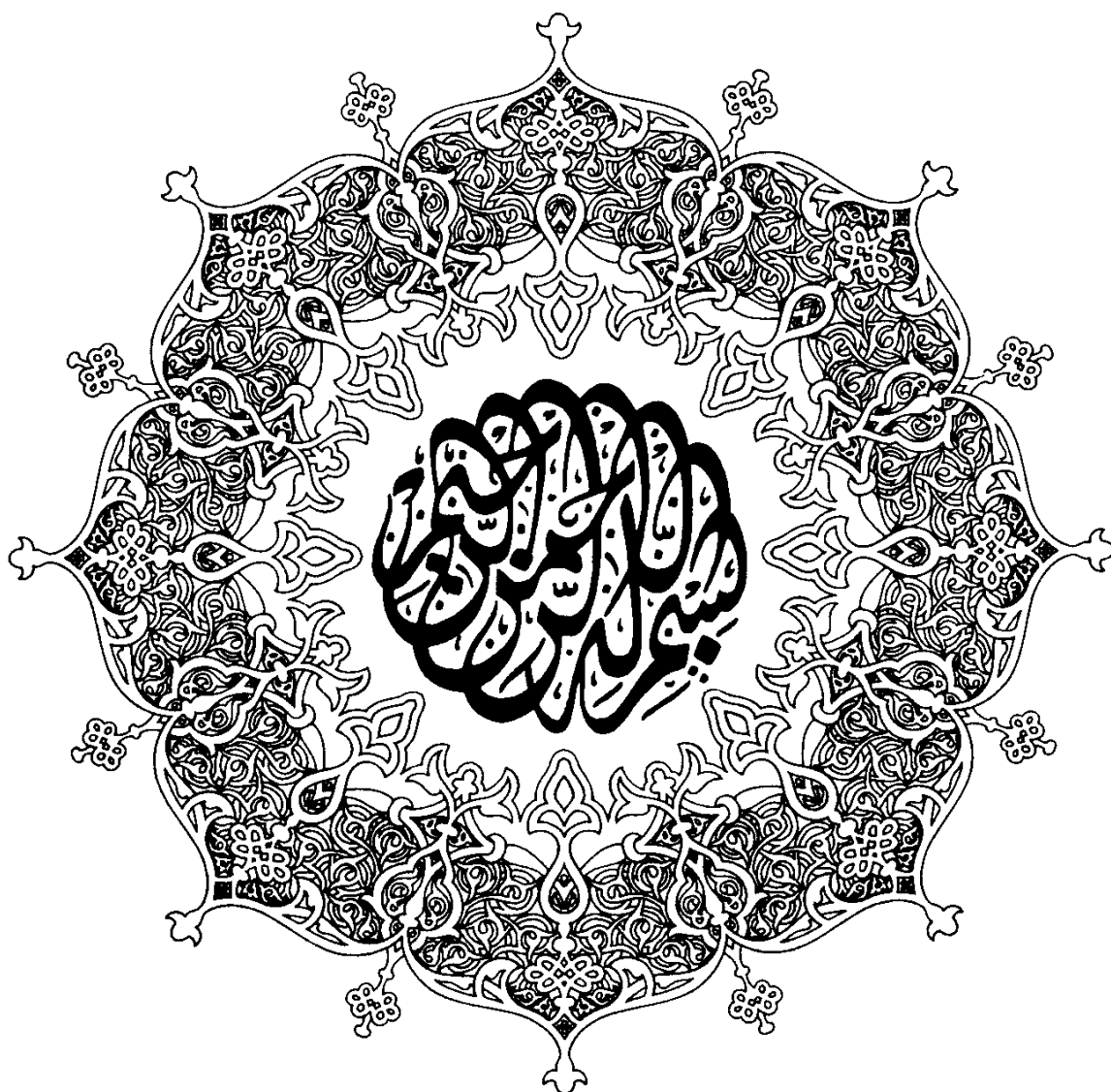


Reviving the Role of Masjid

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As the primary religious institution, the masjid has the greatest role in community building, and its success in performing this role is essential for the wellbeing of the community, particularly where Muslims live as minorities. Sadly, the role of the masjid in many Muslim communities around the globe has recently been reduced to being a physical place where prayers are offered. It is time to reverse that trend and revive the role of this institution to what it was in the early history of Islam. Such a revival cannot be fully realized without first developing a clear understanding from the revelation, the Qur'an and Sunnah, about the importance, virtue, and role of the masjid in Islam.

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said,

“خَيْرُ الْبَقَاعِ الْمَسَاجِدُ وَشَرُّهَا الْأَسْوَاقُ”

“The best patches [of earth] are the masājid and the worst are the markets.” [Reported by Ibn Hibbân]

Thus, Allah chose His Prophets to establish them, He said,

“وَإِذْ يَرْفَعُ إِبْرَاهِيمُ الْقَوَاعِدَ مِنَ الْبَيْتِ وَإِسْمَاعِيلُ”

“And [mention] when Abraham was raising the foundations of the House and [with him] Ishmael.”

[Q 2:127]

And He commanded them to purify them and keep them clean, He said,

“وَعَهَدْنَا إِلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَإِسْمَاعِيلَ أَنْ طَهِّرَا بَيْتِيَ”

“And We charged Abraham and Ishmael, [saying], “Purify My House...” [Q 2:125]

Furthermore, Allah made the reward of building the masājid most abundant. Regarding this, the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said,

“مَنْ بَنَىٰ لِلَّهِ مَسْجِدًا وَلَوْ كَمَفْحَصٍ قَطَاةٍ بَنَىٰ لِلَّهِ بَيْتًا فِي الْجَنَّةِ”

“Whoever builds a mosque for Allah, though it be the size of the ground nest of a sand-grouse, Allah will build for him a house in Paradise.” [Ibn Mâjah]

Allah made the masājid a refuge for the hearts of His righteous servants, as the Prophet ﷺ said, **“There are seven [types of people] whom Allah will protect with His Shade, on the Day [of Resurrection] when there will be no shade except His Shade.”** Of them is, **“A person whose heart is attached to the masjid.”**

It should suffice the caretakers of the masājid that Allah praised them with this description,

“ إِنَّمَا يَغْمُرُ مَسَاجِدَ اللَّهِ مَنْ آمَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَأَقَامَ الصَّلَاةَ وَآتَى الزَّكَاةَ وَلَمْ يَخْشَ إِلَّا اللَّهَ فَعَسَىٰ أُولَٰئِكَ أَنْ يَكُونُوا مِنَ الْمُهْتَدِينَ ”

“The mosques of Allah are only to be maintained by those who believe in Allah and the Last Day and establish prayer and give zakah and do not fear except Allah, for it is expected that those will be of the [rightly] guided.” [Q 9:18]

It was not a coincidence that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ started his mission in Madinah by building the masjid, which he made in its center.

The masjid takes its name from one of the actions of salât (prayer), which is sujood (prostration). It is the action wherein the believer shows the utmost humility to Allah. The salah is the best of our actions, as the Prophet ﷺ told us in the hadith of Thawbân. However, the role of the masjid is not limited to the performance of salah. The masājid should be places wherein Muslims learn how to prostrate their hearts before Allah, and not only their bodies. They are places of tarbiyah (refinement) of the Muslim character.

To the Prophet ﷺ and his Companions, the masjid was not only a place where they prayed, but it was also a place where they learned, recited the Qur'an, made dhikr (remembrance) and du'a' (supplication), met with each other, socialized, received the delegations, prepared the expeditions and raised funds for various good causes. In fact, it was sometimes even a place for tending to

the sick, and a shelter for the homeless. In the physical world, it was at the center of their lives. At the same time, it was the cradle of their learning and spiritual growth.

Whatever can be said about the importance of the masjid for Muslim communities throughout the world it is even more magnified when we talk about the Muslim minorities, to whom the masjid is truly the ark of Noah. In America, for example, Muslims are a small minority scattered throughout a large continent. For some of them, weeks or months may pass by without getting a chance to see another Muslim except in the masjid. The masjid, therefore, constitutes the link between them and their deen (religion). In it, they develop that emotional bond with their community, which is vital to the wellbeing of their allegiance to the ummah and faith in Allah. Many youth may find in the masjid the role models they lack at home. In addition to this, for Muslims to see a masjid- especially the youth who did not grow up in Muslim countries-is vital because it's the most evident symbol of Islam in their tangible world.

The pressing question now is how to revive the role of the masjid in our times, particularly where Muslims live as minorities? Here are some of the things we need to do as a community -

I. We need to educate ourselves regarding what may be done at the masjid

To begin with, one must emphasize that the primary actions in the masjid are salah (prayers), dhikr (mention of Allah), du'a' (supplication), tilawah (recitation), and ta'leem (education). In light of that, priority must be given to the main jama'at (congregants) of the masjid and activities led by the designated imam. Those who do anything else, or do something other than what the main jama'at does, should not cause disruption. Abu Sa'eed narrated that the Prophet ﷺ was in i'tikaf and heard them raising their voices with recitation, so he said,

“إِنْ كَلِمَتَا مَنْجَرٍ رَبِّهِ، فَلَا يُؤْذِنَنَّ بَعْضُكُمْ بَعْضًا، وَلَا يَرْفَعُ بَعْضُكُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ فِي الْقِرَاءَةِ” أَوْ قَالَ: “فِي الصَّلَاةِ”

“Each one of you is in munâjâh (soft conversation) with his Lord, so don't bother one another, and don't raise your voices above each other in recitation (or salât).” [Abu Dawud]

If it is prohibited for someone who is praying or reciting the Qur'an to bother the other worshipers, then it is more prohibited for someone doing something inferior to that to bother them.

Having said that, there is still room for much to be done at the masjid, and while many actions are prohibited in it, such as conducting business, advertising, announcing lost items, many other practices are thought to be prohibited when they are not. Some of us Muslims have this mental image of the masjid as a sterile, extremely quiet place where people pray together and disperse thereafter. This causes some to enforce many restrictions in the masjid that would eventually make it an unwelcoming place for children and families, and even to adult men. However, a tour through the masjid of the Prophet ﷺ during his time may help us rid ourselves of this false conviction.

1) Talking and socializing in the masjid of the Prophet ﷺ:

Jâbir ibn Samurah رضي الله عنه said,

“وكانوا كان لا يقوم من مصلاه الذي صلى فيه الصبح أو الغداة حتى تطلع الشمس، فإذا طلعت الشمس قام، يتحدثون فيأخذون في أمر الجاهلية فيضحكون ويتبسّم

“He ﷺ would not rise from his place where he prayed subh (the dawn prayer) until the sun rises, and when it rose, he would then stand up. They used to chat with one another, even about matters that happened to them in jahiliyyah (before Islam), and they would laugh and he ﷺ would smile.” [Reported by Muslim and Ahmad, and in Ahmad's report, Jâbir said that he witnessed this more than one hundred times]

2) Eating in the masjid of the Prophet ﷺ:

'Abdullâh ibn al-Harith رضي الله عنه said,

“في المسجد الخبز واللحم r كنا نأكل على عهد رسول الله

“We used to eat bread and meat in the masjid during the time of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ.” [Ibn Mâjah]

3) Playing in the masjid of the Prophet ﷺ:

Â'ishah ؓ said,

يسترني بردائه، أنظر r يوماً على باب حجرتي والحبشة يلعبون في المسجد، ورسول الله r لقد رأيت رسول الله “إلى لعبهم

“I have seen the Messenger of Allah ﷺ one day at the door of my house, while the Abyssinians were playing in the masjid, and the Messenger of Allah ﷺ was covering me with his garment to watch their playing.” [Agreed Upon]

4) Sleeping over and staying in the masjid of the Prophet ﷺ:

Abdullah Ibn 'Umar ؓ told us that before his marriage, he used to sleep in the masjid of the Prophet ﷺ. [Agreed Upon; al-Bukhâri collected it in “The Book of salah: Chapter on Men Sleeping in the masjid,” and Muslim collected it in “The Book of the Virtues of the Companions: Chapter on the Virtues of Ibn 'Umar]

'Â'ishah ؓ also told us that a tent was set up for an emancipated black girl in the masjid. [Collected by al-Bukhâri in “The Book of salah: Chapter on Women Sleeping in the masjid]

It is also known that Ahl as-Suffah used to stay in the masjid, and they were about seventy men, as reported by Abu Hurayrah ؓ. [Collected by al-Bukhâri in “The Book of salah: Chapter on Men Sleeping in the masjid]

5) Tending to the sick in the masjid:

'Â'ishah ؓ said,

“خيمة في المسجد ليعوده من قريب r أصيب سعد يوم الخندق فضرب عليه رسول الله

“Saad [ibn Mu'âdh] was wounded on the day of the [battle of] trench, so the Messenger of Allah ﷺ set up a tent for him so that he may be close to him to

visit him [often]." [Agreed Upon; Collected by al-Bukhâri in "The Book of salah: Chapter on Setting Up a Tent in the masjid," and Muslim collected it in, "The Book of Jihad"]

6) Women at the masjid of the Prophet ﷺ:

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ was well aware of the praiseworthy protective jealousy of the men of his nation. Still, he was careful not to let this protectiveness become a reason for Muslim women to be deprived of the chance to visit the house of their Lord. On the authority of Ibn 'Umar ؓ, the Prophet ﷺ said:

"لَا تَمْنَعُوا إِمَاءَ اللَّهِ مَسَاجِدَ اللَّهِ"

"Do not prevent Allah's slave-women from going to Allah's masājid." [Muslim]

Even though the Prophet ﷺ indicated in an authentic hadith (reported by Abu Dawood, al-Hakim, Ibn Khuzaymah, and others) that it is better for a woman to pray in her home than to pray in the masjid, the mothers of the believers and the believing women used to go out to the masjid of the Prophet ﷺ! They wouldn't do what is inferior, so they must have understood that this instruction is to say that women are not meant to go to the masjid five times a day like men, and to assure women who need to be at home, that they will not miss the reward of jama'at. The reward of their praying at home will be greater than their prayer at the masjid, but this applies to situations when there is nothing to do at the masjid but prayer. If there are other benefits such as learning, for example, then it may be better, overall, to pray at times at the masjid.

7) Children at the masjid of the Prophet ﷺ:

Imam Ahmad reported from Abi Bakrah ؓ that he said,

"كان رسول الله ﷺ يصلي بالناس، وكان الحسن بن علي رضي الله عنهما يثب على ظهره إذا سجد، ففعل ذلك غير مرة"

“The Messenger of Allah ﷺ used to lead the people in prayer, and al-Hassan ibn 'Ali would jump on his back when he prostrated, and he did that more than once.” [Ahmad]

Bukhari and Muslim also reported from Abu Qatâdah ؓ that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ prayed at the masjid while carrying Umâmah bint Zaynab, and he would put her down when he made sujood.

As expected, it was not only the Prophet ﷺ who brought his children to the masjid. The Prophet ﷺ would even shorten his prayers at times when he heard the crying of a child, out of mercy for his mother.

8) Non-Muslims entering the masjid:

It is known that the Prophet ﷺ used to receive the delegations in the masjid. It has also been reported that a delegation of the Christians of Najrân stayed over at his masjid. It was also collected by Bukhari in “The Book of salah: Chapter on Major Ablution,” that Thumâmah ibn Uthâl was kept in the masjid for a few days.

Muslims should reach out to everyone around them, and we should invite them to the masjid. Seeing it from inside, and watching the Muslims pray together, is likely to remove much of the fear generated by the anti-Muslim forces to define peoples' perception of Islam and its people. The masjid should be a center for Sharia-compliant interfaith communication and dialogue. Furthermore, we should initiate, participate in, and further all activities of benefit for the communities we live in. If the Islamic center has the appropriate facilities, meetings to discuss issues of common interest should be held at the masjid, such as neighborhood safety endeavors, drug-free zones, and the like.

Having said all of that, it is paramount that we put all of these reports in their right context and understand that the main function of the masâjid is still salât and dhikr. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said to the man who urinated in the masjid,

“إن المساجد لم تبين لهذا وإنما بنيت لذكر الله وإقامة الصلاة”

“The masājīd have not been built for such purposes; they were built for the remembrance of Allah and establishment of the prayers.” (source?)

The Prophet ﷺ forbade all activities that will impede the proper establishment of these functions, to the point that he forbade people who ate garlic or onion from coming to the masjid in order to provide the best environment for those who seek to worship their Lord and engage in His munâjah (subtle conversation). It is therefore important that we keep the masājīd clean and decrease the distractions as much as possible. If we could move some of these functions outside the prayer hall (masjid proper) to nearby rooms, then that would be warranted. The children must also be instructed about the etiquettes of the masjid. If possible, we should designate areas for them where they could be best tended to and positively entertained.

II. We need to build them correctly

By building them correctly, I don't mean making them fancy and luxurious. In fact, there are strict warnings against this in the Sunnah of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. Imâm Bukhari entitled one of the chapters in his authentic collection: "Chapter on the Building of Mosques," where he proceeded to report the following from Abu Sa'eed al-Khudri رضي الله عنه:

، وأمر عمر ببناء المسجد وقال: إكَّنَّ النَّاسَ مِنْ - كَانَ سَقْفَ الْمَسْجِدِ مِنْ جَرِيدِ النَّخْلِ - يَعْنِي مَسْجِدَ النَّبِيِّ
"المطر، وإياك أن تحمر أو تصفر فتفتن الناس"

"The roof of the masjid (of the Prophet ﷺ) was made of palm branches. 'Umar ordered that the mosque be rebuilt and he said, "Protect the people from rain, but beware of using red or yellow (for decoration), thereby distracting the people."

Anas رضي الله عنه said,

"يتباهون بها ثم لا يعمرونها إلا قليلاً"

"They build masājid and boast about that, but they do not use them for worship except rarely."

Similarly, Ibn 'Abbās رضي الله عنه narrated that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said,

"مَا أُمِرْتُ بِتَشْيِيدِ الْمَسَاجِدِ"

"I have not been commanded to build lofty mosques."

About this, Ibn 'Abbas رضي الله عنه commented:

"لتزخرقنها كما زخرقت اليهود والنصارى"

"You will surely [fall into] decorating them (the masājid) just as the Jews and Christians did." [Reported by Abu Dawood with an authentic chain]

The building of the masjid needs to be utilitarian and functional. The architecture of the Islamic centers should be inspired by the good

understanding of their various roles and aim to accommodate them. In addition to the prayer room (masjid proper), there should be, whenever possible, facilities to allow for the place to be used for didactic learning, socialization, sports, hosting the wayfarers, and even shopping for certain items that may not be readily available in the markets.

Traditionally, the scholars disagreed over the rulings concerning attachments of the masjid. Some viewed that they should take the same rulings of the masjid. However, since there is no clear, authentic text of revelation to decide the right position, the use of *maslahah mursalah* (consideration of public interest) may be invoked here. Most of our Islamic centers, and even the newer *masājid* in Muslim countries, have restrooms inside the building of the masjid. By consensus, the use of the lavatory is not permitted inside the masjid. We have basically agreed by building those restrooms inside the building that contains the prayer hall (masjid proper) that the rulings of the masjid are not extended to the entire physical facility that contains it. This will give us the flexibility of having announcements, and even advertisements for the benefit of the community, in the lobbies of our *masājid*. It will also give women during their period a chance to come to the Islamic Center without having to worry about the controversy over entering the masjid, as long as they don't stay in the prayer hall (masjid proper). Moreover, many functions that may cause some discomfort to some members of the congregation, if done in the prayer hall (masjid proper), could still be done within the center but outside the prayer hall.

III. We need to keep them open

Unless there is a legitimate fear of harm to the masjid and its congregation, the masjid should be open at all times and accessible to the worshippers.

Allah said,

” فِي بُيُوتِ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَنْ تُرْفَعَ وَيُذْكَرَ فِيهَا اسْمُهُ يُسَبِّحُ لَهُ فِيهَا بِالْغُدُوِّ وَالْآصَالِ * رَجَالٌ لَا تُلْهِيمُهُمْ تِجَارَةً وَلَا بَيْعًا عَنْ ”
”ذَكَرَ اللَّهُ وَإِقَامِ الصَّلَاةِ وَإِيتَاءِ الزَّكَاةِ يَخَافُونَ يَوْمًا تَتَقَلَّبُ فِيهِ الْقُلُوبُ وَالْأَبْصَارُ”

“[Such niches are] in mosques which Allah has ordered to be raised and that His name be mentioned therein; exalting Him within them in the mornings and the evenings [Are] men whom neither commerce nor sale distracts from the remembrance of Allah and performance of prayer and giving of zakah. They fear a Day in which the hearts and eyes will [fearfully] turn about.” [Q 24:36-37]

The Muslims should always feel welcome to their local masjid, and wherever they travel, they should count on being able to use the masājid on their way. Without the masjid being open at all times, its role will be limited, even if its caretakers believe in theory that masājid have a comprehensive role. Many provisions could be made to facilitate keeping the masājid open. Having a book store attached to the masjid, or in the lobby, is one way to help ensure the presence of someone at all times. Larger masājid should be capable of hiring attendants that will keep the masjid open and look after the facility. For the smaller masājid, having video monitoring and/or alarm systems may provide enough security.

IV. We should staff them correctly

There is no doubt that most of the work to be done at the masjid should be done by volunteers. However, the role of dedicated staff is vital to the wellbeing of larger and more active masājid, for the purposes of stability, consistency, organization, and providing comprehensive services to the community. There is no Baytul-Mâl (Muslim Treasury) here in the West (not even in Muslim lands) to look after the needs of those who shoulder these collective duties. Therefore, it becomes incumbent on the communities to facilitate the dedication of some of their members for this work. There should be an emphasis on providing comprehensive services, such as keeping the masjid open, providing guidance and counseling to the visitors, answering their questions, resolving conflicts between members of the community, conducting marriages, overseeing funerals, and the likes. Such functions could be extremely time consuming and far beyond what could be realistically asked of volunteers. Add to that the upkeep of the facility, paying of bills, dealing with various agencies, handling

official paperwork, and so on. In many churches, the staff is between ten to twenty full time employees. If we could save on some positions through volunteer work, there are others where it is vital to have complete dedication.

It is also important for the masājid to understand the need to diversify their workforce. This will only happen when we realize the broadness of the mission of the masjid. Most of us like the “all-in-one” devices. They are certainly convenient, but not always the best. When it comes to human resources, it is even harder to come by those “all-in-one” imams who are scholars, well-grounded in knowledge, eloquent in both languages, convincing to the elders and befriended by the youth, and at the same time computer savvy and capable of administrative tasks. The larger masājid may need to have several people to perform all of those functions. As for the smaller masājid, with fewer resources, the caretakers of the masājid need to be creative in using the resources available in their region, and in sharing with other masājid.

It is vital that we have cadres among the youth to take charge of the Islamic organizations, and that we empower them for that. There is so much that needs to be done to ensure that the position of an imam is inviting to those talented and accomplished individuals with high aspirations. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said,

“مَنْ وَلِيَ لَنَا عَمَلًا وَلَيْسَ لَهُ مَنْزِلٌ ، فَلْيَتَّخِذْ مَنْزِلًا ، أَوْ لَيْسَتْ لَهُ زَوْجَةٌ فَلْيَتَزَوَّجْ ، أَوْ لَيْسَ لَهُ خَادِمٌ فَلْيَتَّخِذْ خَادِمًا ، أَوْ لَيْسَتْ لَهُ دَابَّةٌ ، فَلْيَتَّخِذْ دَابَّةً ، وَمَنْ أَصَابَ شَيْئًا سِوَى ذَلِكَ فَهُوَ غَالٌ”

“He who will do work for us and has no house, let him have a house, and if he has no wife, let him have a wife, and if he has no servant, let him have a servant, and if he has no riding animal, let him have one. Whoever takes more than that, he is an embezzler.” [Reported by Ahmad from al-Mustawrid ibn Shaddâd]

Notice that the Prophet ﷺ instructed that those who do service jobs for the benefit of the ummah be sufficed, including having a servant (which was the norm for the middle class in their time). This is vital in order for those workers to concentrate all of their thoughts and efforts on their work, so that they may

excel, reach their potential, and achieve the best results possible. At the end of hadith, the Prophet ﷺ reminded the actual workers of the importance of 'afâf (self-restraint). This is an important reminder for anyone who assumes a public position within the ummah, and most important for those who assume the positions of imams and da'ees (preachers).

It is not a secret that many of our youth who went overseas to study for six or seven years came back and refused to work as imams. Many of them cite problems that imams encounter with the masjid boards and the way they are treated as lower ranking employees with many bosses. This is a great waste of the resources of this ummah. It is time our masājid make the positions of imams, youth directors, resident scholars, teachers, and administrators all inviting to the best talents of our communities.

There is no doubt that a big part of the problem of our Muslim countries has to do with the lack of righteous governance and skilled management. These two problems have been sadly inherited by many of our Muslim organizations in the West. Management and administration are not all intuitive, but rather have become a science, and Muslims who live in the West have the opportunity to learn from the experts. There are even free classes offered on how to run non-for-profit organizations. There are known principles of good management that we could learn how to apply, because when we speak of them at an abstract level, we all agree. You won't find any one contesting the importance of clarity of vision, consistency of procedures, transparency, clear identification of roles, empowerment of workers, timely reevaluation, and the likes. The problem is in applying those principles.

Finally, the community of the masjid needs to agree on their ultimate reference. If it is other than the Book of Allah and the Sunnah of His Messenger, as transmitted, understood, and applied by the Companions, righteous predecessors and great imams, the masjid may be moving fast, but it would also be moving in the wrong direction.

وصلى الله على محمد وآله وصحبه والحمد لله رب العالمين